

Character reference for James Funaro.

Dear Judge,

I started seeing James at the gym just after it reopened near the start of the pandemic. He was usually there when I came to the gym, and you could tell he knew his way around the gym because he was in great shape. I did not see him speak to many people which I realized later was because he had just moved to Atlanta. I also ran into James at the grocery store after going to the gym too. One day we got introduced by a mutual friend and I found out we were both twins. After that, we would always speak when we saw each other at the gym but that was it. One day I was really upset at the gym because I had just ran into someone who had been really rude to me. I really liked this person, but I got the clear message they did not want to hang out with me because I wasn't muscular enough. James came up to speak to me soon after this encounter while I was on the shoulder machine. I couldn't really speak, or I would have burst into tears. James knew something was wrong and asked if I wanted to talk or if I wanted to talk outside the gym. For someone I had not really known that long and mostly only spoke to in passing, he went out of his way to see if I was okay. When I could finally speak, I briefly told him what happened and asked him if he could help me get more muscular and he said he would. Someone else would have just left it at that and never followed up. James was different, he made it his mission to tell me what supplements I should get at the nutrition store in the same strip mall as the gym. He also gave me dietary advice. He started giving me instructions on exercises I should be doing and other workout tips. He started checking to see when I was going to the gym to see if it would fit his schedule to go then too. He asked me who the person was who had said that, and I told him. He never spoke to that person but when he realized they were in the gym the same time I was, James would always check on me to make sure I was okay.

I noticed James first rode a bike to the gym that got stolen. He didn't seem to get mad when that happened. He assumed it was a homeless person that needed it more than he did, but he wanted to give them the battery which he had with him. After that he rode a scooter to the gym. I offered to give him a ride home when it was dark and cold outside. He finally let me do that sometimes. One night we were leaving the gym and at the other end of the strip mall it sounded like someone was being harassed. Without thinking, James jumped into action and went to see if he could help. It ended up being two homeless guys talking loudly but James made sure no one was hurt before he would leave.

James is very independent and does not ask anyone for anything but willingly offers to help other people. I had an issue with my knee and went to an orthopedic doctor and physical therapist but neither seem to really help. James recommended I walk backward on the treadmill. I tried it but did not do it as often as I should. Another guy at the gym wanted to work in with me on leg presses one day and we started talking about knee issues. I mentioned what James had told me but did not say his name, the guys said "Yeah! White t-shirt James told me about that!" James always wears a white t-shirt to the gym, so he has gotten to be known for that. I have seen him talk to many other people and can see him giving them advice on lifting or spotting them on heavy exercises. He goes out of his way to help everyone.

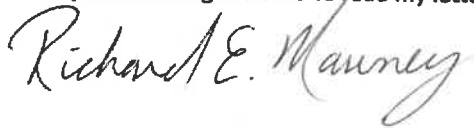
His big heart goes beyond helping people, he has a soft spot for animals too. There was a stray cat near his apartment complex that had a litter of kittens. James offered to take one. He told me about having to bathe her for the first time and all the fleas he had to pick off her. Not many people would do that. James also heard of a dog that needed fostering which he thought potentially needed to have her leg removed. Not many people

would volunteer to take on an animal in that condition, but James did. With James's help, they were able to save the dog's leg. James still has both the dog and the cat and takes extremely good care of them.

James has been going back to school, working on getting his college degree. He is very intelligent and able to complete classes online which saves him money. He is working on a computer science or math degree, I think. I don't ask too many questions because the classes seem too complicated for me. He has also checked into some internship programs he is hoping to be able to do soon. I am impressed with how many classes he has completed and how well he has done in his classes while working full time too.

He has gotten to be friends with a lot of people now through his job at Blake's. Blake's is a gay bar but James is not gay. He still treats everyone with respect, and they love him there. At work James does several things including working the door. One time someone causing trouble, acted like he had a gun, without thinking about himself James took the guy down and restrained him. It was determined there was not a gun but with all the shootings at gay bars you never know. The police were called, and the guy was taken away. Others at the bar realized that James was a hero by acting so quickly while the security guard did not do very much. James has offered to be my wing man if I wanted to go out. We finally did that not long ago and had a fun evening. James has become one of my closest friends. He is funny, kind, dependable and treats everyone with respect. He didn't have to go out of his way to help me, but I will always be grateful that he did. He was not looking for anything in return from me for helping me. I just wanted you to know the wonderful, generous person and friend James is to me and the Midtown community in Atlanta.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter,



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